

Abstract

The share of Georgia's public expenditure for education has increased by several times in recent years. Nevertheless public funds are insufficient to cover basic education-related needs. Funds are lacking for equipment, teaching materials, and classroom facilities. Teachers' salaries constitute about one third of the national average. Therefore the compensatory function of supplementary contributions to schooling is considered extremely important for the sustainability of schools.

The major policy task in Georgia is to facilitate the effective and efficient functioning of this compensatory mechanism. At the same time it is important to reduce the burden placed on parents as the main source of additional funding.

Recent innovations in education reform created promising preconditions for the fulfillment of the above tasks. The new measures include: transforming schools to independent entities of public law with their own bank accounts and the right to attract other financial resources, allowing local governments to contribute for capital investment in schools, establishing boards of trustees with students, teachers and parents to approve school budgets, oversee spending and elect principals.

However, these innovations have not yet become functional. So far schools have failed to diversify sources of additional income. Contributions from local governments or businesses are still low. The majority of parents note that the assistance they render to schools is of mandatory nature that comes from the general pressing environment and unsatisfactory conditions at schools. Moreover the management of the attracted funds is inefficient. Parents make additional contributions automatically without being informed of the purpose.

The government should help schools use the opportunities provided by the new legislation. This can be achieved through awareness-raising about legal ways to attract voluntary contributions and participatory budgeting, building skills of key agents (principals, boards of trustees), analyzing tendencies and disseminating best practices.

1. Introduction

The study was carried out jointly by the International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management and BCG (Business Consulting Group) research between December 2006 and May 2007. The study represented the first effort in Georgia to describe the phenomenon of parental supplementary contributions to schooling and is supposed to serve as a baseline for understanding the impact of recent important changes in school financial management model in Georgia. The recent reform of the general education system started from 2005 upwards and includes important changes like:

- Introducing Per Capita financing model (money follows the student) with three different coefficients for schools in urban, rural and mountainous areas;
- Transforming schools to independent entities of public law with own bank accounts and a right to attract additional financial resources and get income from economic activities;
- Establishing boards of trustees to participate in budget planning and oversee spending.

In addition to general purpose and tasks, the study also aimed to answer the following particular questions, which are relevant for Georgia:

- Do parents, teachers and principals consider the amount provided by the voucher enough to cover expenses related to the implementation of the state curriculum? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the voucher system in the opinion of parents?
- How representatives of the school community (principals, teachers, parents) and experts assess the impact of recent structural changes and regulations aiming at the diversification of school income and improvement of budgetary processes on extent and nature of supplementary parental contributions?

2. Background / context

Box 1. Socio-economic Data (The World Bank, CIA)

Currency: lari, GEL per USD – 1.7 (2007)

GDP (USD billions): 1996 – 3.1, 2005 – 6.4, 2006 – 7.7

GDP annual growth: 2005 – 9.6, 2006 – 9.4

GNI per capita (USD): 1995 – 510, 2000 – 700, 2006 – 1580

Population below poverty line: 31% (2006)

Unemployment, total (% of total labor force): 2005 – 13.8

Public education spending (% of GDP): 1995 – 7.7, 2000 – 2.2, 2006 – 3.1

Public education spending (% of government spending): 13.1

Ratio of pupils to teacher (primary level): 2006 – 14.5

Ratio of pupils to teacher (secondary level): 2006 – 9.1

Sources: The World Bank, <http://go.worldbank.org/LJW2UB0SI0>;

CIA The World Factbook (on currency and poverty line), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

2.1. Socio-economic background

In the early nineties Georgia experienced one of the most severe transformational crises among all post-socialist countries. Of all the transition economies, Georgia is second only to Moldova in the severity of the transformational recession that it suffered in the early 1990s.¹ Although lately Georgia has experienced steady GDP growth, the legacy of the first decade of the transition still hampers development processes in the country. Georgia is still one of the most highly indebted countries in CIS. The total external debt was around USD 2 billion in 2005, and public and publicly guaranteed debt service obligations were USD 159 million, i.e. about 36 per cent of government revenue, reducing the public resources available for other purposes, including education.

Table 1. Macro-economic indicators and consolidated education budget (government data)

¹ IMF World Economic Outlook database

	2005	2006
Nominal GDP (GEL million)	11592 (6859 USD)	13080 (7740 USD)
Average annual inflation (%)	8.0%	5.0%
Real GDP growth (%)	9.3%	7.5%
Consolidated government expenditure as % of GDP	25.1%	26.6%
MoES expenditure as % of GDP	0.7%	2.6%
MoES expenditure as % of consolidated govt exp	2.8%	9.8%
Total MoES budget (GEL million)	80.9 (47.9 USD)	340.5 (201.5 USD)

Source: MTEF (Government of Georgia 2006)

According to the State Department of Statistics average household income formed 303.5 GEL (USD 179.5) in 2005. The unemployment rate was 13.6 (2006) and up to 40 percent of population was below the subsistence minimum GEL 107.5 (USD 63).

2.2. School system and governance (including the legal status of informal payments)

The state of Georgia is supposed to provide free twelve-year general education for all citizens. General education in Georgia consists of primary, basic and upper secondary stages. It is regulated by the Law of Georgia on General Education. Primary (grades 1 to 6) and basic (grades 7 to 9) are compulsory.

In 2005 Public Schools were converted from local-government budget organizations to autonomous legal entities of public law or LEPLs with their own account.

The new law on general education (2005) envisages significant changes in the school governance system. In particular: the structure of general education institutions consists of pedagogical council, board of trustees, directorate, self-management of pupils and disciplinary committee (The law on general education, chapter VI. Principles of management of general educational institution). Boards of Trustees (BOTs) are composed of elected teachers and parents (minimum 6 and maximum 12 representatives of parents and pedagogical council in total), a student representative and in some cases a local-government nominee. They approve the budget, and oversee and advise school management.

Principals are elected by BoTs by majority of votes on the basis of programs submitted by the candidates. The candidates (maximum 3 for each school) are being chosen by the MoES on the basis of open competition (Clause 42. Rule of elections of a director).²

According to the new legislation teachers are appointed by school directors on the basis of the open competition, but BOTs may demand from the school director to cancel the contract signed with a teacher prior to the expiration of its term in case of violation of contractual terms.³ With the purpose of considering the disciplinary breaches, BOTs elect disciplinary committees consisting of equal number of teachers, parents and secondary level pupils (Clause 37. Board of trustees).

² Such elections were held in February - June 2007 for the first time in Georgia.

³ In 2006, by the initiative of the teacher professional development center a professional ethics code for teachers was elaborated. (Students were actively involved in preparing the draft version).

Main funding of a school is implemented via issuing vouchers (financial instrument given to a pupil by the state). The state and/or local management bodies compensate capital expenditures of public schools.⁴

Public schools have the right to attract other financial resources, which are used for the fulfillment of educational goals and functions. Incomes and expenditures should be reflected in the school budget. Schools have an independent bank account and its seal (Clause 51. Funding of general educational institution).

A pupil, parent or teacher has the right to attract voluntary contributions for charity purposes. A school shall take all reasonable measures to avoid extortion of financial resources and other goods (Clause 14. Freedom of expression). Financial activities at the school level are overseen by Boards of Trustees. BoTs also approve school budgets and elect school principals.

Table 2. Distribution of schools and students by urban/rural areas

	Urban Districts	Rural districts Rural	Rural districts Mountainous
Number of schools 2528 ⁵	765	1122	641
Number of students 632 111	349 704	212 985	69 422

Source: MoES, analytical department (2007)

2.3. Financial situation

The general education budget is GEL 269 million and forms 80% of the overall education budget. The following fragment explains the essence of the new financing model of schools:

“New *Per capita* financing principle of ‘money follows the student’ has been introduced in Georgia in 2005. The initial amount of the voucher is GEL 220 (approx. 120 USD) per student (2006). The voucher formula varies only according to the location of the school (highest for those in highlands, lowest for those in cities): city schools get 100 per cent of the voucher, village schools 150 per cent and those in mountainous areas 180 per cent. Vouchers cover current but not capital expenditures. Small schools can receive an extra amount per pupil from the central budget, and extra educational and teaching services and special educational curricula can be financed locally.

The lump-sum amount received from the MoES (paid into the school’s own bank account) can be spent in any way that school management, approved by the Board, decides, subject only to a minimum salary rate for teachers, depending on their qualifications, experience and the size of their class.

The new formula-funded, autonomous-school model is intended to build in incentives for schools to increase the efficiency with which they use their funds and the quality of the education that they provide. There are worries that smaller schools do not receive enough funding under this system to enable them to survive. However, it is the function of formula funding to draw attention to such schools: as is already happening, extra allocations can then be made to those schools where the cost of closure exceeds the expected benefit.”⁶

⁴ Capital expenditures include the purchase of capital assets, strategic and specific stocks, goods, land plots, non-material assets; purchase of buildings and constructions, machinery and equipment, furniture, transport and other principal means, capital repairs, building and reconstruction.

⁵ In the process of optimization the number of public schools has been decreased in 2007.

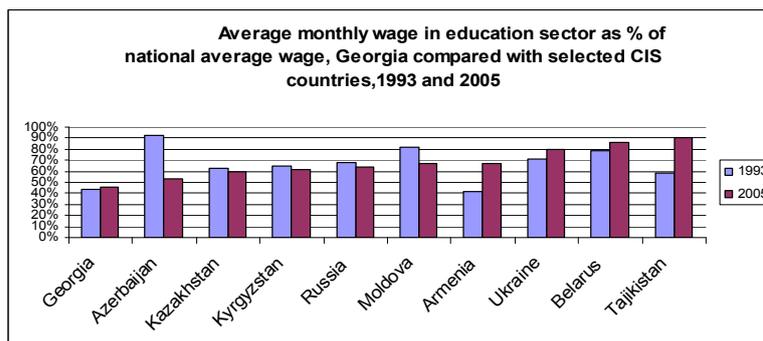
⁶ Education Policy Note, 2006

2.4. Other relevant contextual factors

2.4.1. Teacher Salaries

The decree of the minister of education and science of October 2005 sets GEL 115 (approx. USD 70) as basic salary for teachers that forms approximately 50% of the national average.⁷ The figure 1 compares this figure in Georgia with other CIS countries and shows that it is lowest in Georgia. It is not surprising that schools find it difficult to recruit and retain teachers of high quality.

Graph 1. Average monthly wage in education sector as % of national average wage, Georgia compared with selected CIS countries, 1993 and 2005



2.4.2. National Entrance Examinations

In 2005 the unified entrance examinations were introduced in Georgia. Standardized testing methods are used across a range of subjects. The process is administered by the National Assessment and Examination Center (established in 2004) under the governance of MoES. *Transparency International* (together with the American Councils for International Education) monitored the examination process and indicated in its report on the 2006 examinations that the testing process was well organized and transparent. The new system was widely supported in the country and a large majority of test takers, parents and administrators felt confident that it would help to eliminate corruption in university admission (*Transparency International*, 2006). **School grades are currently considered as a less important factor causing corruption in schools as state grants to HE students are awarded on the basis of students' scores in entrance examinations.** Introduction of the sliding scale grants system (instead of 100% state grant) helped to double the number of students receiving state grants in 2006 compared to a year earlier. Social grants are awarded, in addition, to students from mountainous areas, conflict regions, minority ethnic groups, families of people killed in wars and internally displaced families.

3. Findings

3.1. Real (Private) Cost of Informal Payments for Public Schooling

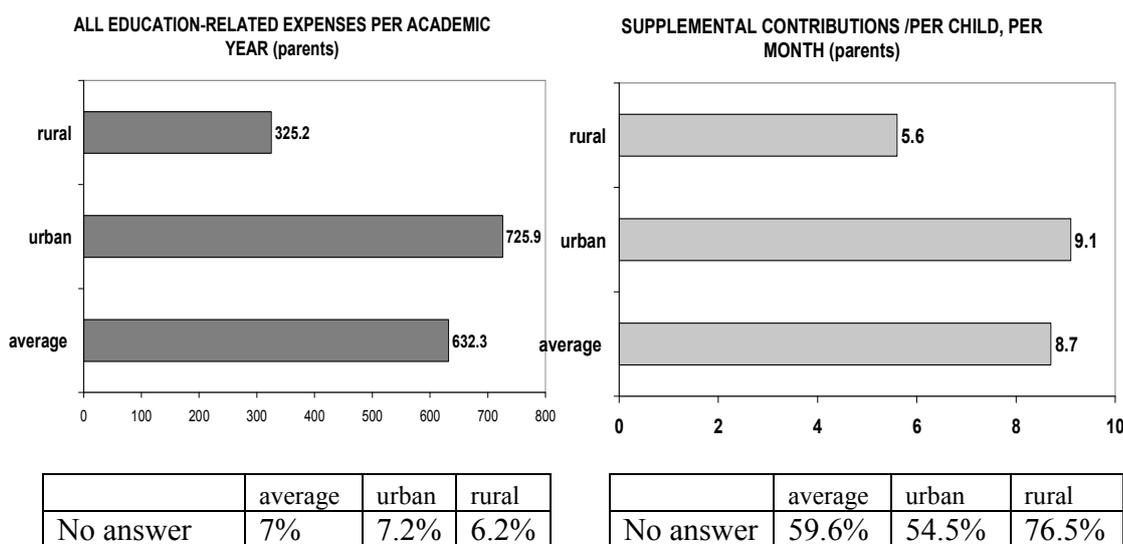
Parental expenses related to education per academic year form GEL 633 in average that makes 27% of the average income of the interviewed parents and includes both the supplemental contributions for schooling as well as essential expenses such as clothes, stationery, transportation, etc. Half of the interviewed parents (55.7%) deny making any supplemental contributions to schools. In their opinion, the amount they spend for their children's education does not include supplemental contributions.

⁷ In December 2007 the minimal salary of teachers has been increased to GEL 165.

40% of the interviewed parents consider that up to 10% of total education-related expenses come on supplemental contributions. 45% of them state that they mostly pay money once a month.

Urban and rural schools differ considerably by the overall amount spent by parents on education as well as the amount of supplemental contributions to schooling. In the city, parents spend GEL 726 average per child per year while the same index in the rural schools is twice as little as in the city and does not exceed GEL 325 per child per year. In the opinion of parents, the average amount of money spent for supplemental contributions sums up to GEL 8.7 per student per month (GEL 9.1 in urban and GEL 5.6 in rural areas (Graph 2).

Graph 2. Education related expenses and supplemental contributions to schooling⁸



The difference can be explained by the lower financial capacity of rural population and closer personal ties in rural school community. There is a large difference in the responses of principals of urban and rural schools. Only one principal out of 23 rural schools confirmed receiving supplemental contribution for schooling. 22 rural school principals denied receiving any contributions. About one third of the urban principals stated that the parental contributions were common.

3.2. Reasons for Parental Contributions

The changes envisaged by the school reform have significantly improved the situation with school funding but there is still much left undone. In spite of numerous efforts of MoES (infrastructure development, computerization of schools), many components of the school life are still inadequately funded or left without funding. Schools still require external support. As mechanisms of diversification of financial sources have not been enacted, yet, the main burden falls on parents. Some schools have managed to attract additional resources through one time assistance provided by non-governmental organizations or businessmen. There have been cases of assistance offered by local authorities and central government though this is not a regular practice.

⁸ Average is calculated from the responses of the respondents who indicated concrete figures. 55.7% of respondents said there are no supplemental contributions for public schooling, and 3.7% - couldn't answer.

Box 2. Voucher system as perceived by parents

Pros

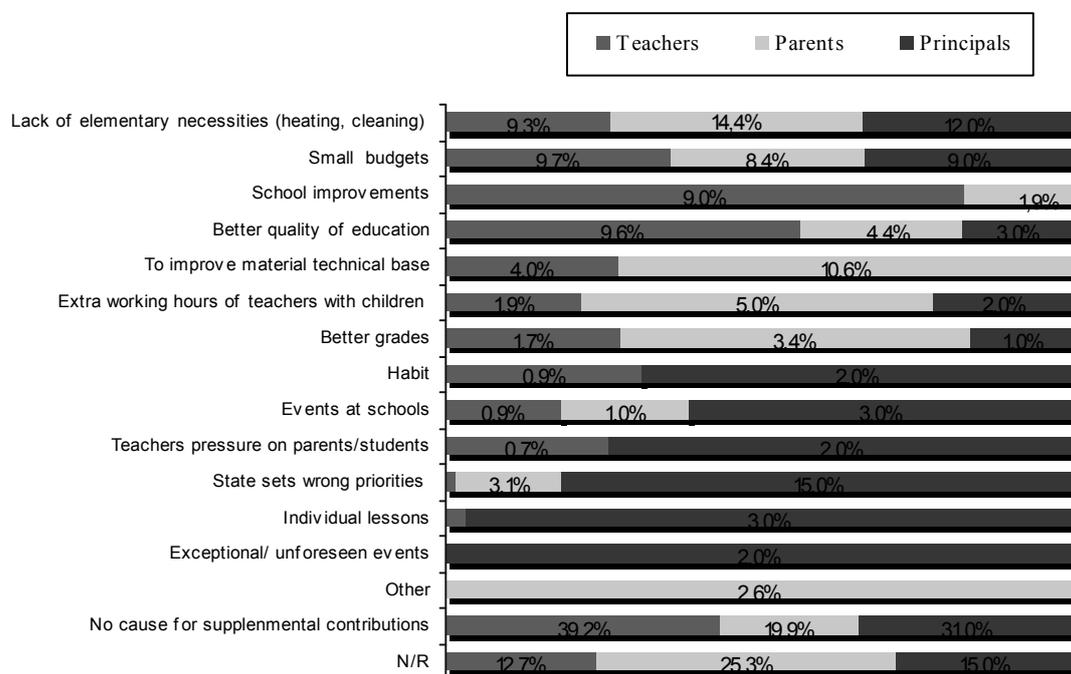
- It definitely improves the school's material and technical base;
- Ensures timely payment of teachers salaries;
- Schools have their own budget;
- In order to attract more students and funds, schools have to be more competitive;
- This automatically implies improvement of quality.

Cons

- The largest portion of the amount is spent to cover utility expenses and administrative costs;
- The amount is not sufficient to pay optimum salaries to teachers, technical staff salaries, purchase equipment, organize cultural events;
- It is impossible to use funds to improve the material and technical base;
- Schools with small number of students face the necessity to reduce the staff and release funds.

20% of the interviewed parents agree that the supplemental contributions made by parents represent an important source of revenue for schools. A considerable percentage of the teachers share the same position (14.4%). The principals are less inclined to agree with the statement though, on the other hand, 35 principals out of the 100 interviewed note that it is necessary for schools to collect supplemental contributions from parents to meet budgetary requirements.

Graph 3. Causes of parental contributions



3.3. Additional Contributions – Compulsory vs. Voluntary

As noted earlier, schools mobilize extra funds mostly from parents. It can be said that *“parents help schools to survive in most of the cases”*.

The absolute majority of teachers and parents disagrees with the statement: “School principals put pressure on teachers to collect some money from the parents for school needs.” The majority of the interviewed teachers note that school administration does not require collecting money from parents. Only 4.4% state that they have to collect money from students for school supplies and maintenance every month. Only 4.5% parents speak about the pressure from the side of teachers. However, **62% of parents note that the assistance they have rendered to schools is not of voluntary but of mandatory nature that comes out from the general pressing environment and unsatisfactory conditions at schools.**

The focus-group discussions have made it clear that additional input sometimes has the form of taxation as students get regular instructions from a teacher/school to bring money. Otherwise s/he may be “black-listed” as a non-payer putting the student into a complicated situation. *“Collecting money by schools has been announced illegal, though this money is still collected for different needs being called contributions. In fact, the unlawfulness has been legalized. I believe the money I give my child to pay for a cleaning service is not a contribution but a fee I pay monthly.”*

On the other hand, even without teachers’ request, most of parents deem obligatory to collect money for certain needs. *“We do not live in prosperity to give money for the school needs voluntarily, though I have to. The school is not forcing but the entire situation, my consciousness and atmosphere are forcing”*.

As the experts explain, the contribution itself means a voluntary input but very often is of mandatory nature, which is certain tactics to mobilize funds from the parents. *“If it is an entirely voluntary process, the schools will not be able to mobilize the resources they really need”*.

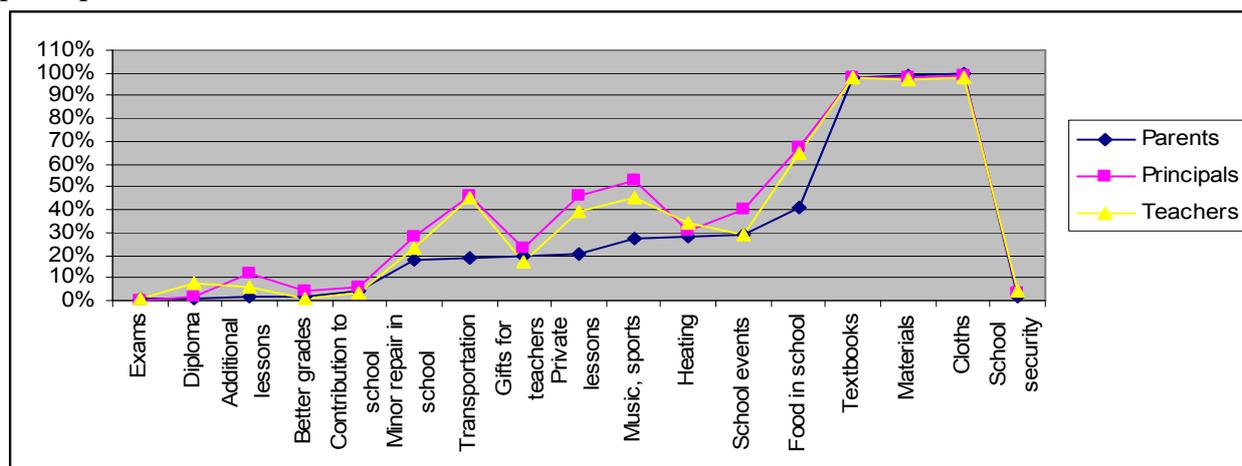
Parents mentioned that MoES actively fights the practice of informal payments. Restrictions provided by the law significantly reduced the cases of extortion at schools. Some of the experts say, however, that the restrictions and regulations imposed by the state are not strict enough to fully eliminate the practice. *“This might be a strategic approach as the state failed to provide sufficient funding for schools .and these inputs really help schools to function”*.

3.4. Types of private contributions

Respondents listed many different types of parental contributions to schooling, which can be divided in two major groups – formal (documented) and informal (undocumented). Formal contributions are legal while informal contributions can be both legal and illegal depending on whether they have the form of extortion and are made for the private gain.

Informal payments (both legal and illegal) represent a particular interest for this study. The survey shows that about half of parents make informal contributions to schools and up to 30% of all parents are involved in at least one form of illegal activities.

Graph 4. Percent of parents who pay at least once a year /responses of parents, teachers and principals



20% of parents pay for gifts. Parents note that nowadays the practice of presenting gifts doesn't have the form of the bribe owing to two factors: severe control and prohibitory measures from the Ministry of Education and low financial capabilities of parents. Some respondents even say that nowadays, presenting gifts *"is considered as a shameful practice, it happens on personal/ individual level, presents are rarely made on behalf of the class"*. 19% of parents say they pay for minor repairs in schools. In the opinion of principals, 30% of parents pay for repairs. Then, in the opinion of parents, follow heating and school events (27-29%).

As it can be seen from the chart, parents rarely pay for better grades (2%). This is probably linked with the introduction of the national entrance examinations – students are admitted in HE institutions on the basis of the exam score, school grades don't play the role.

Parents say that supplemental payments are rare for exams and diplomas (1%) and principals agree. However, figures given by teachers differ; they state that up to 8% of parents pay for diplomas. This may indicate the existence of corrupt deals between parents and principals. In focus-group discussion parents mentioned the problem of low attendance rates on the secondary level and existence of the practice of illegal payments to principals in exchange of diploma. *"In the 11th grade, some of my child's class mates do not attend classes as they are totally focused on tutoring and do not want to "waste time". I think they must be barred from school by rule but they do not face any problem in this regard."* *"A great number of 11th grade students do not attend classes at schools. We do not notice how they put money in the principal's pockets but I will not be astounded if parents give bribes not only to school principals but to the whole staff."*

21% of parents pay for private tutoring and almost half of them noted that they have addressed class teachers for private lessons. In the opinion of teachers and principals, the percent of parents who pay for private lessons is around 40%. Both experts and parents note the cases when teachers force students to take private lessons from them in particular to receive better explanations. According to the survey teachers do not practice extra group lessons at schools but rather coach the students as tutors. During open discussion the parents mainly associate the problem with low salaries of teachers but assess the practice negatively. *"Although teacher's salaries are low, extortion has no justification and schools cannot be used as mechanisms for making money."* *"...Many would have avoided such practice if they were offered better salaries."*

3.5. Administration of Additional Contributions

Respondents were offered a list of certain needs and requested to indicate whom they pay for these needs. Those who confirmed the fact of payment mentioned that parents usually pay to a group of parents but not to teachers or principals. In this system, a group of parents plays a role of an intermediary link.

However, the responses on power over parental contributions are ambiguous. 77% of the teachers do not agree with the statement that parents have power over parental contributions. The same statement is not backed by 80% of the school principals and 83% of the parents. According to the survey results we conclude that neither school principals nor the teachers have much influence over parental contributions. Absolute majority of parents (90.3%), teachers (95.3%) and school principals (97%) disagree with the statements that school principals have power over parental contributions. Only 5% of the school principals and 7% of the parents agree with the statements that teachers have power over parental contributions. This can be explained by the fact that respondents simply don't know who and how administers the payments.

3.6. Informal Payments and Education Quality

The survey results show that additional inputs have controversial effect on the education process. In one case, additional inputs have a legitimate form that has a positive impact on the learning process and leads to the improvement of school infrastructure, equipment, material resources and educational processes. In another case, the process still has the form of extortion that reduces the level of parents' loyalty to schools.

Teachers (97%) and school principals (96%) oppose the statement that students' success at schools depends on contributions made by parents. 80% of parents also share this opinion. 91.5% of the parents are sure that his/her child's teachers make decisions in the best interest of a child and 83% of the parents believe that school principals are fair and honest.

Every fifth interviewed principal states that schools cannot provide quality education without receiving parental contributions. However, 23% of the principals state that parental contributions hinder the education process.

3.7. Perceived Remedies to the Problem of Illegal Informal Payments

Additional inputs made by parents have both negative and positive effects. On the one hand, additional inputs facilitate the functioning of schools and contribute to various educational activities; increase parents' co-participation and civil involvement in the school processes, thus strengthening their control over the services offered by schools.

On the other hand, the practice of accepting/administering additional inputs needs to be improved: *"We emphasize the rule of law in schools and preach civil awareness in the classroom and at the same time make corrupt deals."* Moreover additional inputs are not entirely voluntary: a considerable part of population falls in the low income group, for which it is a burden to make additional contributions, and schools sometimes place in favorable conditions those students whose parents make contributions.

The experts believe that there is still much to be done to overcome the problem of illegal informal payments, including the following:

- In-depth analysis of the problem;

- Enforcing the guiding principles of teachers behavior ethics;
- Launching public awareness campaigns against the practice of mandatory informal payments;
- Raising public awareness on available legal mechanisms of voluntary additional contributions and participatory budgeting.

“The development of the practice of formalized contributions requires both mental shift and improvement of the financial situation. Today the majority of population is in extreme poverty and cannot assist schools with money. Those who can make contributions are not psychologically ready for that. Stakeholders are not frequently aware of the exact purpose of payments and mechanisms of spending as they are not sufficiently involved in school budgetary processes.”

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

4.1. Main findings

Public funds are insufficient to cover basic education/related needs of the student.

- Numerous components of school life are not funded sufficiently or are left without funding. Funds are not sufficient to pay optimum salaries to teachers saying nothing about other needs related to the implementation of the state curriculum;
- Teachers’ salaries are low (about a third of the national average) and this (in the opinion of parents) negatively influences the quality of their job performance. Survey results showed that 21% of interviewed parents pay for private tutoring. Almost half of them noted that they have addressed class teachers for private coaching. 20% of respondents pay for gifts for teachers.

Most of available alternative mechanisms of attracting additional money are not put in practice and the main burden falls on informal parental payments to schooling.

- The share of business, LG and other potential sources of financing is extremely low Every fifth interviewed principal states that schools cannot provide quality education without receiving parental contributions. 62% of parents note that the assistance they have rendered to schools is not of voluntary but of mandatory nature that stems from the general pressing environment and unsatisfactory conditions at schools.

Budgetary processes are not well organized at a school level to ensure proper planning and spending of additional financial resources.

- Payment procedures are rarely formalized, payments are chaotic and unregistered (the purpose of payment is not often clear). Perceptions of teachers, parents and principals differ in terms of how supplemental contributions to schooling are accepted and administered and what results are produced. Parents often make additional contributions automatically without being informed of the purpose as they have formed the opinion that this is a mandatory procedure.
- Newly established boards of trustees do not fully internalize and exercise their rights and responsibilities, yet. Participatory planning does not yet work in practice, school community is not fully aware of the opportunities provided by the new legislation.

4.2. Policy Implications

Although in recent years the systematic and considerable increase of the overall education budget and the share of general education component are evident, the school system is still underfinanced in Georgia.

The main task of the government is to ensure the financial sustainability of the school system through the effective functioning of the compensatory mechanism of supplemental contributions. At the same time it is important to reduce the burden placed on parents as main sources of additional funding to schools. This can be achieved through facilitating the diversification of sources of additional income of schools and increasing the quality of school budgetary processes,

With this aim, MoES has introduced a range of promising structural and legislative changes but, due to the pace of the reform, the information extensively flows from top to down in a very short period of time and school communities cannot process it at once. New structures, systems and mechanisms of school financial management have not yet become functional.

4.3. Recommendations

MoES should intensify efforts to:

- Build skills of key agents at school level (principals, Boards of Trustees) for fundraising and diversification of income.
 - Current training and consultation programs offered by the Ministry of Education and Science are of general character. There is a need to proceed on the next stage and make training and consultation programs more tailored to the specific needs of schools. Resource centers can play a key role in gathering and structuring information about school needs and problems (analysis of questions and complaints received by the resource centers).
 - Based on such analysis a concrete strategy for training intervention should be developed (which training themes should be offered in which sequence to which schools).
- Raise awareness of school communities on available legal mechanisms of voluntary additional contributions and participatory budgeting.
 - The role of resource centers is again very important in this respect. Resource centers can be offered training on how to consult schools on these issues. The accent should be reversed from simply listing the legal mechanisms to providing explanations whether or not this or that form of income can be considered legal and how particular illegal forms can be transformed to legal ones.
 - In parallel to consultations, certain thematic publications can be published and disseminated in schools.
- Analyze the tendencies and progress in terms of diversification and growth of alternative income and efficient spending of existing sources at a school level; gather and structure best practices and make this information available to schools.
 - Elaborate a unified form for analyzing school budgets with regard to (a) effectiveness of attracting additional resources and (b) efficiency of spending, which will serve as guidelines for schools and a basis for structuring information across all schools for identification of tendencies and best practices.
 - Establish fixed intervals for periodic assessment of schools in this regard (for example annual cycles) and make results of assessment available for all schools – through annual reports.

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